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2003 OC TAP

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Oneida County Communities That Care Community Board

FUNDING AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT:

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Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program
Oneida County Department of Social Services
Oneida County Department of Mental Health
Oneida County Public Health Department
Oneida-Herkimer-Madison BOCES

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Some 3700 youth in the 7th, 9th and 11th grades from 12 school districts, one Catholic school and two alternative education schools participated in this survey. They are the source of the data. We thank them for their time, effort and honesty. In appreciation of their cooperation, we will share what they told us with those that want or need to know this information in the hope that together with youth we can make a difference.

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INTRODUCTION

..... 2003 OC TAP

The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) Survey is a voluntary and anonymous student survey that various communities throughout the United States have used to document the concerns, perceptions and behaviors of teens. Dr. Stephen Small from the University of Wisconsin, Cooperative Extension, developed the survey. In New York State, the Community and Rural Development Institute at Cornell University coordinates the local distribution. In this capacity, they provide technical assistance, electronically scan the answer sheets and compile the databases. In the case of the Oneida County 2003 TAP Survey, the Oneida County Communities That Care Community Board sponsored it; the Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program and the Cornell Cooperative Extension Area Youth Development Program administered it; and the Oneida County TAP Steering Committee, made up of representatives from schools, agencies and county government, oversaw the survey instrument revision and the survey implementation.

The best way to know how our youth are doing is to ask them directly. The TAP Survey provides a safe, confidential and anonymous way for a large number of youth to respond directly to a wide range of questions. The questions cover such topics as - how they spend their time, the importance of their education, what worries them, how closely parents monitor their behavior, substance abuse, sexuality and more. Their responses to these questions are documented and analyzed in this report, and this serves as a document on the status of youth in Oneida County. This report is shared with the community at large. Copies are sent to schools, agencies, local libraries and the media. In addition, each school district that participated in the survey receives the data for their students, so that they can compare the responses of their students to that of all of the youth that participated in the Oneida County TAP Survey. Current, accurate information that comes directly from our youth is essential to identifying needs, and this is a critical first step in planning for ways to better serve children, youth and families.

This is the second Oneida County TAP Survey. The first one was conducted in 1999. It is the intention of the Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program to conduct the survey every four years. So, the next one will be in 2007. In 1999, over 5700 students from 13 school districts, the two Catholic schools, the two alternative schools and the House of the Good Shepherd participated in the TAP Survey. For the 2003 TAP Survey, 3700 students participated; they were from the 12 school districts associated with the Oneida-Herkimer-Madison BOCES, Notre Dame High School and the two alternative schools, Lincoln Avenue Academy and

James Street Academy. The survey instrument used for the 2003 TAP Survey was similar to the one used in 1999, however, there were some significant changes. The formatting was changed to make it better organized and more readable, and some of the questions were changed. The 2003 TAP Survey had 150 questions; of those 89 were asked in the 1999 survey and 61 were new. These changes reflect some new thinking that has occurred over the past four years about approaches to determining both risk factors and assets of youth and to furthering community development. In addition, the National Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS) Survey, which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention administers nationally every two years, served as a resource for 28 questions regarding at-risk behaviors. About half of these 28 questions were also part of the 1999 TAP Survey, but there was a concerted effort to add more so that further comparison could be made between our local youth and those nationally.

Oneida County Communities That Care's sponsorship helped advance the TAP Survey. Their membership includes representatives from schools, county government and community agencies. In examining the needs and resources of the community, their research has relied heavily on the results of the 1999 Oneida County TAP Survey. Because of these factors, all of the schools associated with the Oneida-Herkimer-Madison BOCES participated in the survey; the Oneida-Herkimer-Madison BOCES as well as the Oneida County Department of Social Services, Public Health Department and Department of Mental Health provided the necessary financial support; and the Department of Mental Health also provided critical staff support.

The 2003 TAP Survey was administered in the same way as the 1999 TAP Survey. The process is spelled out in a Memorandum of Understanding that was signed by the Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program (HOCCPP), Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Area Youth Development Program and each of the participating schools. In brief, this process entails the following steps:

- The TAP Steering Committee approves the survey instrument, which is then shared with schools.
- HOCCPP arranges a survey time with each school.
- Staff from the Oneida County Department of Mental Health recruits volunteer survey administrators.
- CCE trains the volunteers.

- Schools inform parents, staff and students about the survey - the type of questions, that it is voluntary and confidential and that parents can insist that their child not participate.
- Over a four week period (March 18 to April 11, 2003) the survey is conducted - each day at a different school.
- Cornell University receives the answer sheets which they electronically scan.
- Cornell University then compiles the databases and sends the total database to HOCCPP and each school database to each respective school.

- HOCCPP analyzes the data for Oneida County and issues a report.

As noted above, the 2003 Oneida County TAP Report will be shared with the community at large and area schools. Schools can use the Oneida County TAP Report for comparison purposes. The intention and hope are that the Report will help us focus on the well-being of our youth and will help motivate us to work together with our youth to improve the quality of their lives.

FINDINGS

2003 OC TAP

The findings are divided into 11 different focus areas. The first five cover the main youth risk behaviors and are labeled as follows: 1. *Tobacco*, 2. *Alcohol*, 3. *Marijuana and Other Drugs*, 4. *Sexuality*, and 5. *Mental Health and Well-being*. Three other focus areas explore: 1. *Perception of School and Future*, 2. *Parent and Child Relationships*, and 3. *Perceptions of Self and Peers*. One focus area looks at youth's experience with *Sexual and Physical Abuse*; another examines their sense of *Personal Safety* in general; and the last focus area shows what youth believe are the *Positive Influences* in their lives.

Under each focus area, the brief narrative and graphs highlight the information of key interest. This information comes from the response pattern to those questions related to the focus area and is generally from an analysis of the total population that participated in the survey. Comparisons are often made between the results of the Oneida County 2003 TAP Survey and those of the 1999 TAP Survey. For more detail, Appendix A contains the response rate for each question of the 2003 TAP Survey for the total population of participating youth, as well as a breakdown by gender and by

the three grades - 7th, 9th and 11th. For those 92 questions that were also in the 1999 TAP Survey, Appendix A also includes the response pattern for the total population that took the 1999 survey.

In addition, under the first five focus areas that pertain to youth risk behaviors, the findings include a comparison between youth in the 9th and 11th grades that participated in the Oneida County 2003 TAP Survey and those in the same grades that took the National 2001 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS) Survey. Just 7th, 9th and 11th graders take the Oneida County TAP Survey, and just those in high school (9th - 12th graders) participate in the National YRBS Survey. Thus, the two grades, 9th and 11th, that are common to both surveys are used for comparison purposes. Again, the narrative just provides the highlights of these comparisons between youth locally and nationally. For more detail, Appendix B shows the response rate for each of the 28 questions that are in both the Oneida County 2003 TAP Survey and the National 2001 YRBS Survey, and the local and national rate is shown for both the 9th and 11th graders combined as well as for each grade separately.

Tobacco

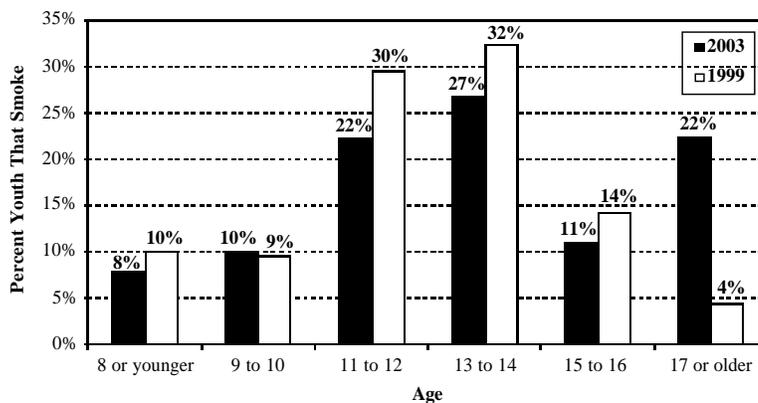
Most of the youth participating in the survey indicated that they have never smoked tobacco. Seven out of every ten respondents (71.5%) said that they had never smoked a whole cigarette. This is dramatically higher than the number that indicated that they had never smoked in the previous survey. In 1999, 56% of all respondents said that they had never smoked.

Among the 28.9% of all youth that have ever smoked, about four out of ten (40%) began smoking before the age of 13 (*figure 1*). This is a decline of about ten percentage points from respondents in the 1999 survey. Among youth that have ever smoked, about a quarter (26.3%) currently smoke with some regularity (smoked at least ten out of the last 30 days) and about one in five (21.4%) indicated that they had smoked on school grounds in the last month.

The most typical source for youth to get cigarettes was to borrow them from someone else (28.5%) (*figure 2*). That is followed

closely by getting someone else to buy their cigarettes for them (24.1%). About one out of every seven youth (14.9%) said that they actually bought cigarettes themselves from a store.

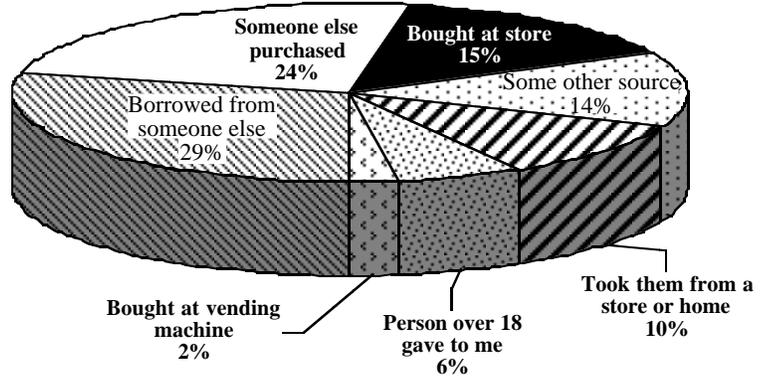
Figure 1:
**Among Youth That Smoked,
the Age When They First Smoked a Whole Cigarette**



A smaller proportion of Oneida County youth are smoking than is seen nationally. Whereas, almost half (48%) of 9th and 11th graders nationally indicated in the National 2001 YRBS Survey that they had smoked a whole cigarette, just 36% of Oneida County 9th and 11th graders reported this. And, whereas, 24% of 9th and 11th graders nationally said they had smoked during the past 30 days, just 20% of Oneida County youth reported this.

Again, comparing the 9th and 11th graders with the local and national surveys, nationally youth were more prone to buy tobacco for themselves at a store (22%) than was found for Oneida County youth (16%).

Figure 2:
**Usual Source of Cigarettes During Past 30 Days
Among Youth That Smoked**



Alcohol

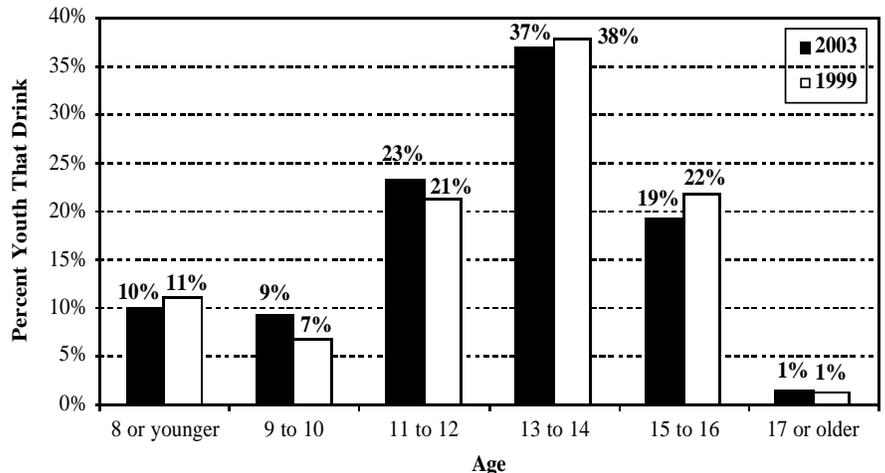
Slightly more than half of all youth (55.8%) indicated that they were not current alcohol users - 51.8% said that they had never used alcohol at all, and another 4.0% said that they had used alcohol but did not any longer. This percentage is virtually the same as from the Oneida County 1999 TAP Survey. About four out of every ten youth that said they currently use alcohol had tried drinking before the age of 13 (figure 3). This is slightly higher than the percentage of respondents in 1999 indicated.

Among the 44.2% of all youth that do currently use alcohol, about half (49.2%) indicated that they used it with some regularity (at least a few times per month) (figure 4). This is a decline in terms of regular use from the 1999 results - in 1999 about 60% of the alcohol users said that they did so at least a few times per month. The percentage of youth binge drinking has also declined. About 23% of all youth in 1999 said that they drank five or more drinks within a two to three hour period in the last 30 days, only about 14% of respondents in 2003 had similar drinking patterns (figure 5).

While legal aged buyers continue to be a popular source for alcohol among respondents (20.6% in 2003), this is down considerably from 1999 when

almost one in three youth (32.7%) that drink got a legal aged buyer to supply them with alcohol. Friends' homes (14.4%), or their own homes (14.1%), without parental knowledge, still accounts for a large part of where youth get their alcohol. And in some cases, youth reported that parents provide alcohol directly to youth (13.3%). But the most common answer for where youth got their alcohol in the 2003 sample was from other, unnamed, sources (29.6%) (figure 6).

Figure 3:
**Among Youth That Drink,
the Age When They First Had a Drink of Alcohol**



In comparing the 9th and 11th grade participants of the 2003 TAP Survey with the 9th and 11th graders who participated in the National 2001 YRBS Survey, it is apparent that a lower percentage of Oneida County youth are drinking alcohol than is seen nationally. Nationally, 77% of the 9th and 11th graders reported that they had at least tried drinking alcohol other than a few sips; of the 9th and 11th graders in Oneida County, 64% reported they tried drinking. About 44% of the youth nationally, and just 40% of Oneida County youth, had at least one drink of alcohol during the past 30 days. And in terms of binge drinking, 26% nationally said they had five or more drinks in a row within a couple of hours during the past 30 days; in Oneida County for 9th and 11th graders, it was 20%.

Figure 4:
Frequency of Alcohol Use Among Youth That Drink

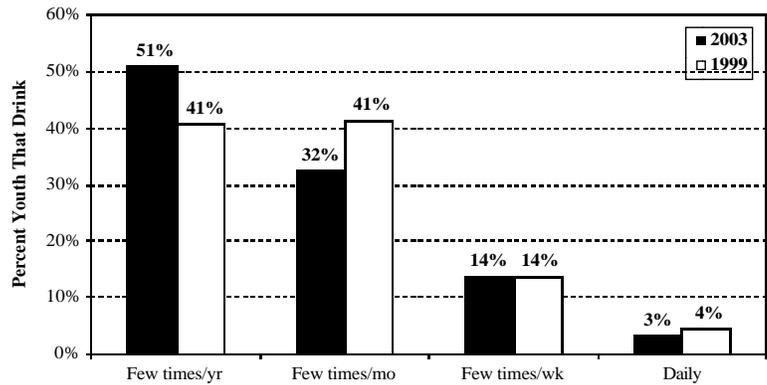


Figure 5:
Frequency of Binge Drinking Among All Youth During Past 30 Days

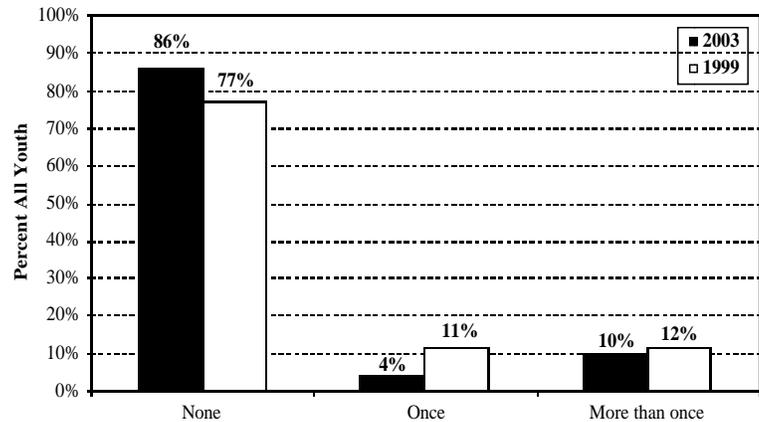
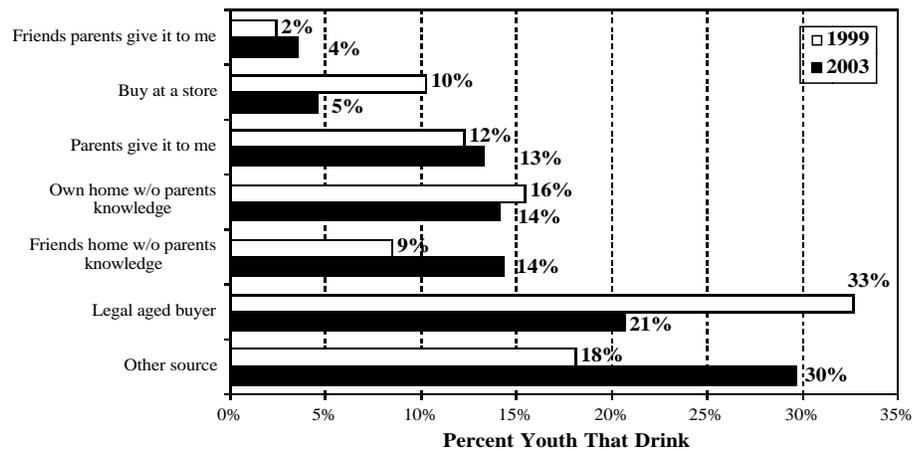


Figure 6:
Usual Source of Alcohol Among Youth That Drink



Marijuana and Other Drugs

Of the 83.4% of youth that said they were not currently using marijuana, about 8% had previously tried it at least one time. These numbers are not dissimilar to those from the 1999 survey. Slightly more respondents indicated that they had first tried marijuana before the age of 13 - about 29% in 2003 versus 26% in 1999 (figure 7).

Among the 16.6% of all youth that said they currently use marijuana, almost three-quarters said that they use it with some regularity (figure 8). About 71% of current marijuana users indicated that they smoked it at least a few times per month. As much as 40% of users did so on, at least, a weekly basis. This is considerably higher than the “frequency of use” pattern for alcohol. While relatively few respondents overall (4.0%) have said that they have used marijuana on school property, about 42% of those who have done it on school property indicated that they had done so ten or more times in the past 30 days.

Far and away, the most common resource for accessing marijuana is through friends. Almost half (48%) of all marijuana users cited friends as their usual source for the drug. One in four users actually purchased their marijuana from a seller or dealer, and another 9% said that they grew their own plants. One in ten (10.4%) cited an unnamed source as the most usual way that they got their supply. And, one in twenty (5%) said they got their marijuana, most typically, from a brother or sister (figure 9).

Among other drugs, relatively few youth indicated that they had ever tried or were currently using cocaine (4.3%), heroin (2.6%), methamphetamines (4.0%), ecstasy (5.1%), or steroids (3.5%). However, there was some wider use of both inhalants (8.5%) and other people’s prescriptions (8.9%). In the past year, one in six (16.5%) of all respondents indicated that they had been high on alcohol, marijuana or some other illegal drug while in school during school hours.

A lower percentage of 9th and 11th grade students in Oneida County, when compared to 9th and 11th grade students

Figure 7:
**Among Marijuana Users,
the Age When They First Used Marijuana**

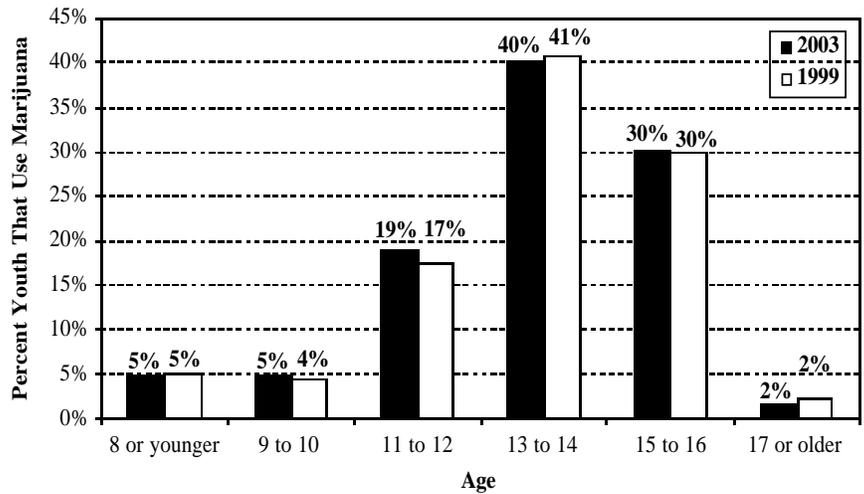
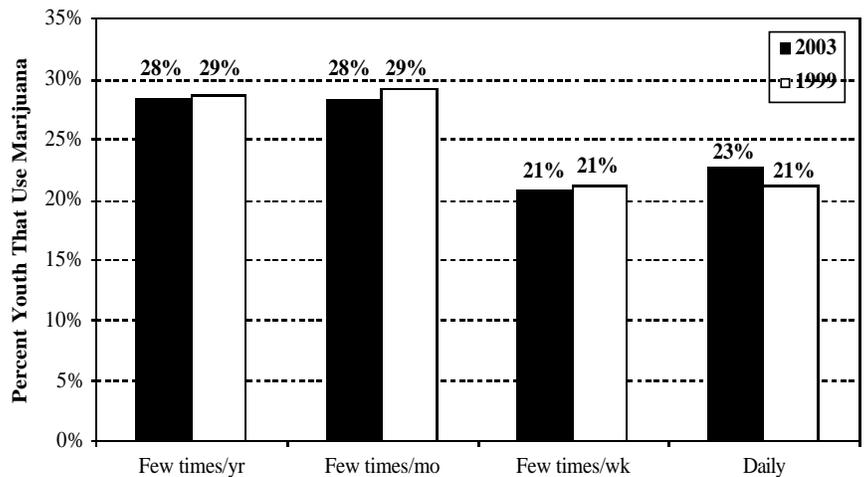


Figure 8:
**Frequency of Marijuana Use
Among Marijuana Users**

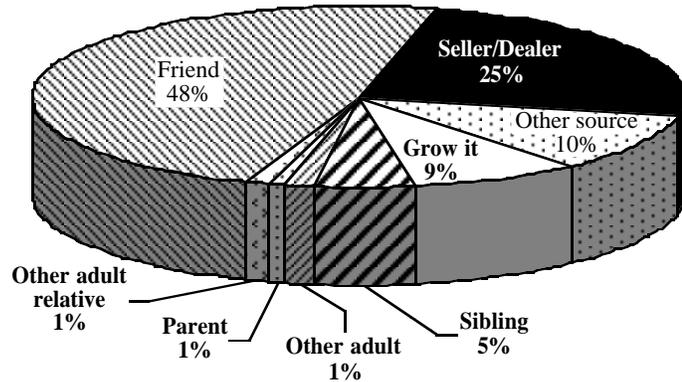


that participated in the National YRBS Survey, used illegal drugs. Thirty-four percent (34%) of Oneida County’s 9th and 11th graders reported trying marijuana, whereas 41% nationally say they had tried marijuana. Just 20% of Oneida County’s 9th and 11th graders indicated they had used marijuana in the past 30 days, whereas nationally 41% said they had used it during that period.

As far as other illegal drugs, it is the same pattern. A

smaller proportion of Oneida County's 9th and 11th graders, versus what is reported nationally, indicated they had ever used cocaine, inhalants, heroin, methamphetamines, ecstasy or steroids.

Figure 9:
**Usual Source of Marijuana
 During Past 30 Days Among Marijuana Users**



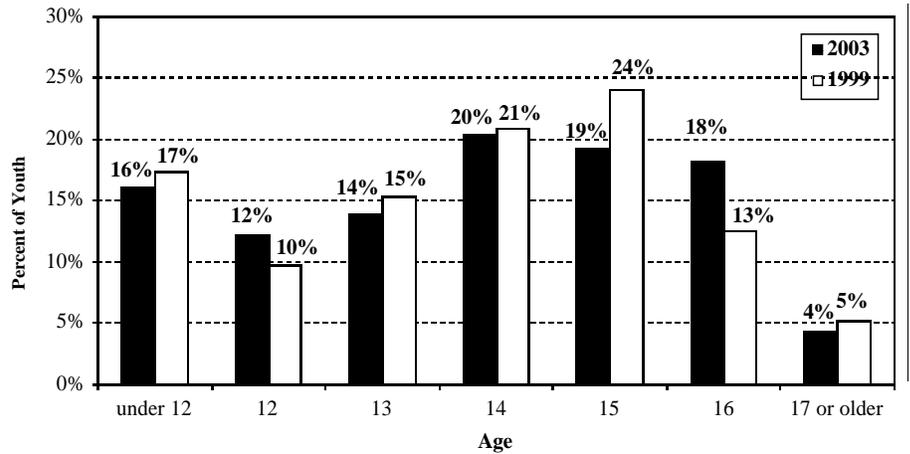
Sexuality

Most youth (70%) have not yet experienced sexual intercourse. This varies considerably based on the age of the respondents. About 86% of 7th graders and 72% of 9th graders have never had sex; but among 11th graders, only 55% never had intercourse. In terms of those respondents that have had intercourse, slightly more indicated they had intercourse before the age of 13 in the 2003 survey (28%) than did those responding in 1999 (27%) (figure 10).

The numbers of partners that sexually active teens have had has not changed much since the last survey in 1999. While fewer sexually active teens said that they had but one partner (43% in 2003 versus 48% in 1999), the number of teens who had four or more sexual partners has not changed over the four year period (figure 11). About one out of every four (26%) sexually active teens had at least four partners in their life.

About half of all sexually active teens (54%) regularly used condoms as a means of preventing pregnancy. Two out of three sexually active teens (66%) said that they regularly used condoms to prevent the transmission of sexual diseases. While those numbers are positives in terms of preventing unwanted pregnancies and disease, still, as many as 40% of

Figure 10:
**Among Sexually Active Youth,
 the Age When They First Had Intercourse**



teens were not using condoms when it comes to preventing pregnancy. In addition, as many as one in four (25%) failed to use them with any regularity as a method of disease prevention. This is despite the fact that three out of every five (60%) felt it was either easy or very easy to get access to condoms. More than one in four (27%) reported they didn't know whether they could get a condom if they wanted.

This may be a reflection of a decline in concern about

HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. While it was alarming that so few youth in the 1999 survey worried about STDs (only 47% worried at least “a little” about this issue), even fewer respondents now worry about such life threatening prospects. Only about 24% of respondents in 2003 said that they worried at least “a little” about STDs (*figure 12*). While a somewhat greater proportion of those that were sexually active (35.4%) showed concern with disease transmission, this is still a considerably smaller number when compared to sexually active respondents in 1999 (57.7%).

In comparing between the Oneida County TAP Survey and the National YRBS Survey, a lower percentage of 9th and 11th graders in Oneida County than seen nationally were sexually active, and for those that were sexually active, they tend to have had their first sexual encounter at a somewhat older age and to have had somewhat fewer partners. In Oneida County 36% of the 9th and 11th graders indicated they had sexual intercourse; nationally it is 45%. Of those sexually active, 30% of Oneida County and 33% of U.S. 9th and 11th graders had sexual intercourse prior to age 14. And of those sexually active, 55% of Oneida County and 64% of U.S. youth indicated they had more than one partner.

Figure 11:

Number of Sexual Partners Among Sexually Active Youth

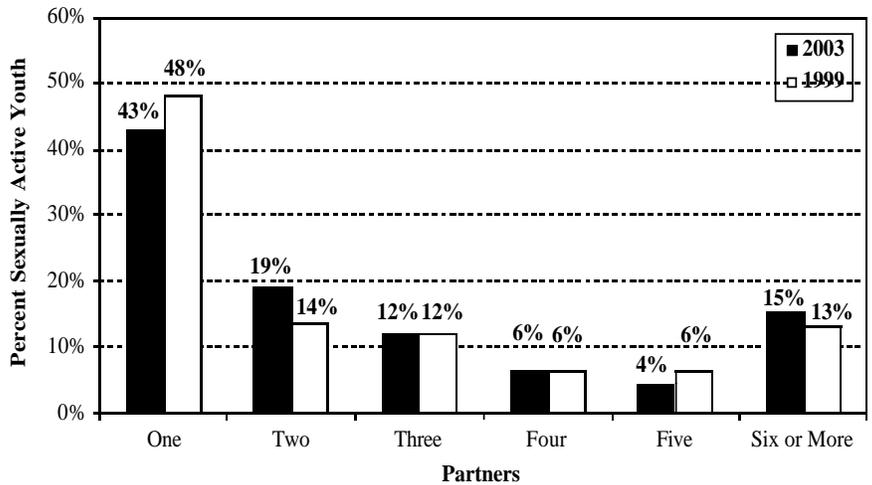
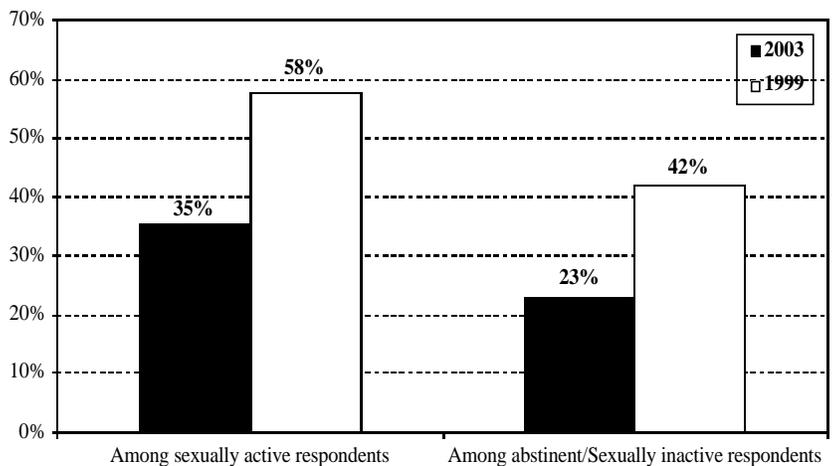


Figure 12:

Percent of Sexually Active Youth and Those Not Sexually Active That Worry About Getting HIV / AIDS or STDs



Mental Health and Well-Being

About one out of every four youth (28%) indicated that they had experienced sadness or hopelessness for an extended period of time during the past 12 months. While noting that the question was somewhat changed from the 1999 survey, this does suggest a slight decline in the number of youth suffering from depression since the previous survey was conducted. A substantial number of all youth (33%) still seriously considered running away from their problems as a viable alternative (*figure 13*). Unfortunately, there are a large percentage of respondents (20%) who reported they had seriously considered suicide as a way of dealing with the pressures of adolescence. While this percentage still seems high and difficult to fathom, it does suggest a decline in the number of young people in the county that see suicide as an option. In 1999, almost one out of every four youth (24%) had indicated that they had seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months.

Suicide ideation is often followed by plans and activities that can have tragic consequences for youth and their families. Among respondents that have said that they had seriously considered suicide, almost 90% indicated that they took it to the next level, namely planning how they might actually carry out such an act. Almost half (46%) of all youth that said they had seriously considered suicide said that they had actually attempted to harm themselves. And one out of every six respondents that had seriously considered suicide indicated that they had harmed themselves to the point that it required medical attention. These numbers for the most part are higher than in 1999, with the exception of the number of youth that ultimately did harm themselves (*figure 14*). While 16% of the 2003 sample that said that they seriously considered suicide ended up requiring medical treatment for an attempted suicide, about 20% of the 1999 sample reported that they actually harmed themselves.

Looking for help is an important step in dealing with such difficult feelings. Unfortunately, a third of all youth (33%) that had serious thoughts of suicide reported they did absolutely nothing the last time they had been confronted with those feelings. Other than that “inaction,” talking to a teen

friend (18.6%) was the most common action youth pursued the last time thoughts of suicide surfaced. A smaller number said that they turned to their parents or a caring adult (7%). Other than those options, some youth chose to withdraw from people and activities (6.3%); some chose to make a suicide plan (5.9%); and some turned to drinking or drugs (5.6%) in an attempt to escape from such thoughts (*figure 15*).

The five main questions in the Oneida County 2003 TAP Survey regarding despondency and suicide come from the National 2001 YRBS Survey. For the first question regarding

Figure 13:
Percent of Respondents That Indicated That They:

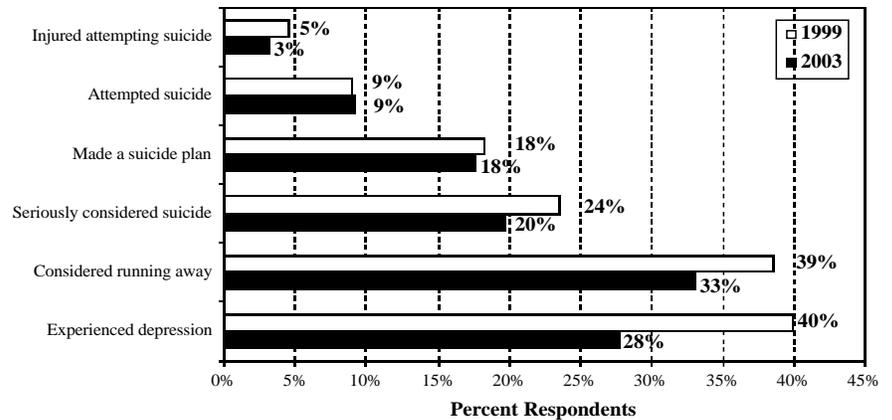
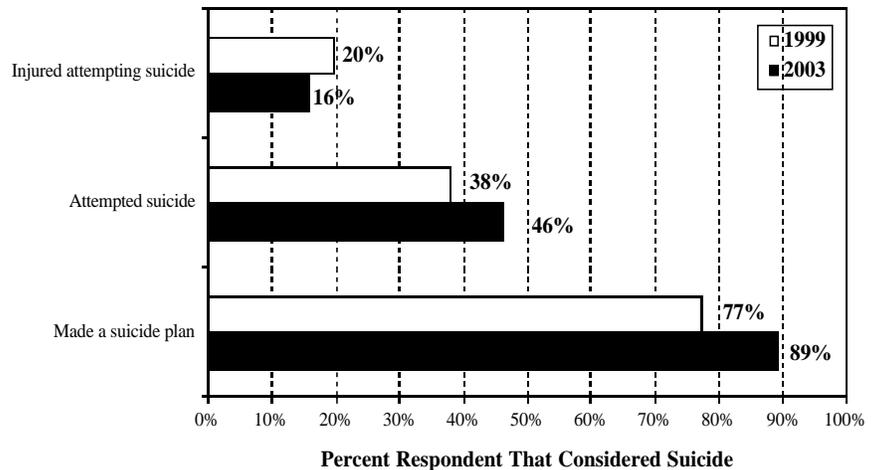
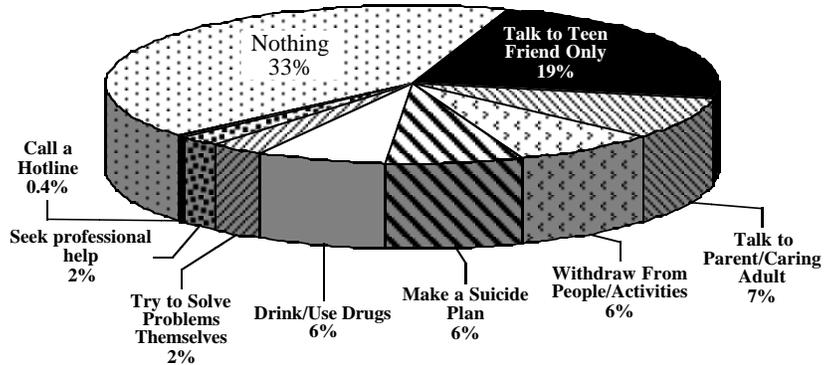


Figure 14:
Among Respondents That Have Seriously Considered Suicide, the Percent That:



depression, 30% of Oneida County and 30% of U.S. 9th and 11th graders said they had been depressed for an extended period of time over the prior year. The next four questions deal with suicide. Looking at suicidal ideation, 22% of Oneida County's 9th and 11th graders versus 18% nationally, said they had ever seriously considered attempting suicide; and 19% in Oneida County, versus 15% in the United States, indicated they had made a plan to attempt suicide. Fortunately, when it comes to actual attempts, 9th and 11th graders in Oneida County appear to be no more likely to attempt suicide (both Oneida County and U.S. - 10%) and no more likely to be injured by an attempt (both - 3%).

Figure 15:
What Respondents That Have Had Serious Thoughts of Suicide Do as a Result of Those Thoughts



Perceptions of School and Future

Virtually all respondents (96%) said that they were at least a little concerned about getting good grades. This is similar to the proportion that indicated a concern with good grades in 1999. The majority enjoyed going to school (64%) and most (79%) felt safe in the school environment. These numbers are slightly less than in the 1999 survey. Almost three out of ever four youth (73%) said that they intended to go to college after they graduated from high school. This is a significantly greater number than said so in 1999 when only 63% of all youth said that they were planning on going to college after graduation (*figure 16*).

A considerable majority of youth reported that they felt that teachers are compassionate and committed to the educational process (*figure 17*). As many as 80% of youth surveyed said that they felt that their teachers cared about how well they were doing in school. And 82% of youth felt that their teachers had high expectations for them in the classroom. However, there was less agreement among youth that the rules that exist are enforced fairly and evenly. Only about 57% of respondents said that the rules at their school were the same for everyone, and slightly fewer youth (56%) felt that they were applied fairly.

Figure 16:
Percent of Respondents That Indicated That They:

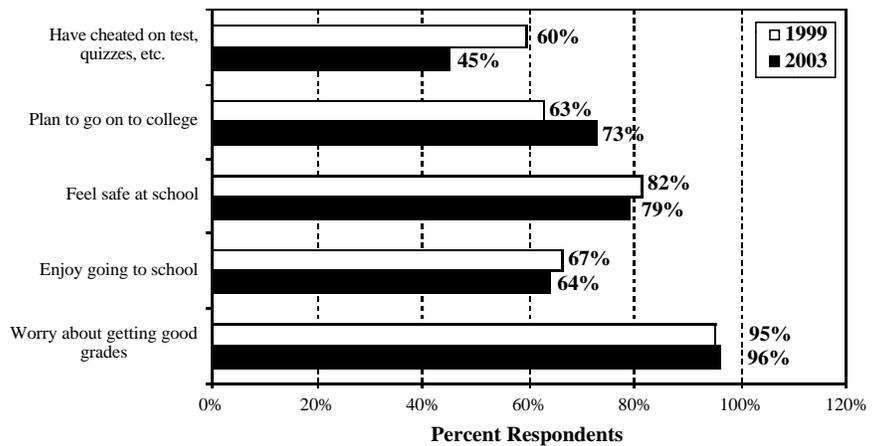
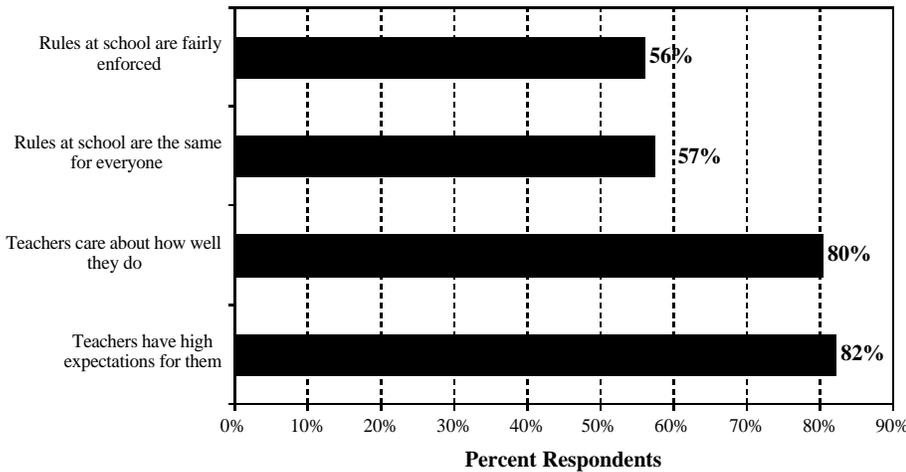


Figure 17:

Percent of Respondents That Feel:



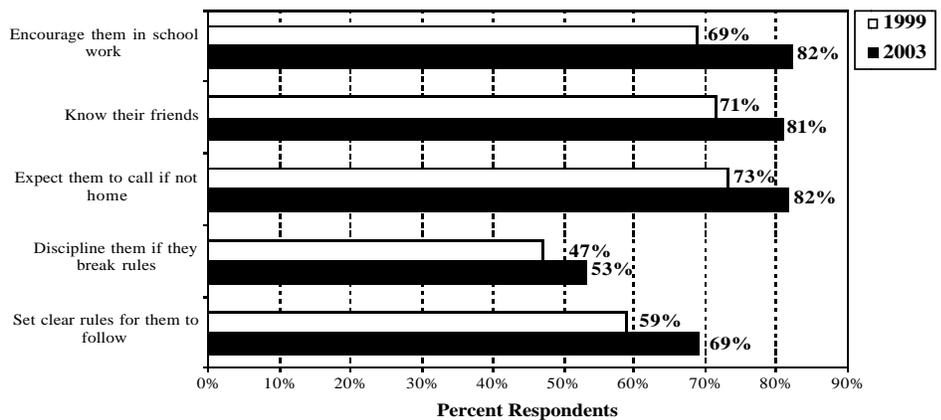
Parent and Child Relationships

Parents continue to play an important role in helping youth define their limits. The majority of teens (69%) said that their parents set clear rules for them to follow. This is a significant increase over respondents in the 1999 survey (59%). In addition, teens expected to be punished if they failed to follow these rules. Slightly more than half of respondents (53%) said that their parents discipline them if they break these rules. Parents also appear to have become more involved in their children's lives. In 1999, slightly more than seven in ten youth said that their parents knew their friends and expected them to call if they were not at home to let them know where they were. In the 2003 survey, as many as eight in ten youth now said that their parents were similarly involved in their lives - 81% of parents know their children's friends and 82% expect them to call if they are not at home. Parents appear to be more involved in their teen's schoolwork as well. About 82% of respondents said that their parents encourage them in their schoolwork. In 1999, only about 69% of all respondents felt parents were encouraging in terms of schoolwork (figure 18).

While parents continue to be good resources of

Figure 18:

Percent of Respondents That Indicated That Their Parents Usually:



information in terms of family history and family values (76%), there's been a marked decline in terms of discussions between youth and their parents about some of the more dangerous activities that youth face, namely sexual activity and the use of drugs. While about half of all youth (53%) said that they have had discussions with their parents about the dangers and consequences of being sexually active, this is a decline of almost 10% since 1999. Discussions between parents and their children concerning the dangers of drugs

and alcohol has also declined, dropping from about 73% in 1999 to 65% in 2003 (figure 19).

Youth in the 2003 survey also appeared to worry about child-parent relationships somewhat more than they did in 1999. As many as 84% of teens worried at least a little about getting along with their parents at home - this is an increase of 7% over those surveyed in 1999. And, as many as 72% worried about how well their parents got along at home. Again, this is a significant increase over the percentage (56%) that worried about their parents' relationship in 1999. More youth were also worried about the financial well-being of their families. In 1999, about 49% of teens said they were worried at least a little that their families didn't have enough money to get by. In 2003, as many as 68% worried about this (figure 20).

Figure 19:

Percent of Respondents That Indicated That They Have Ever Talked to Their Parents About:

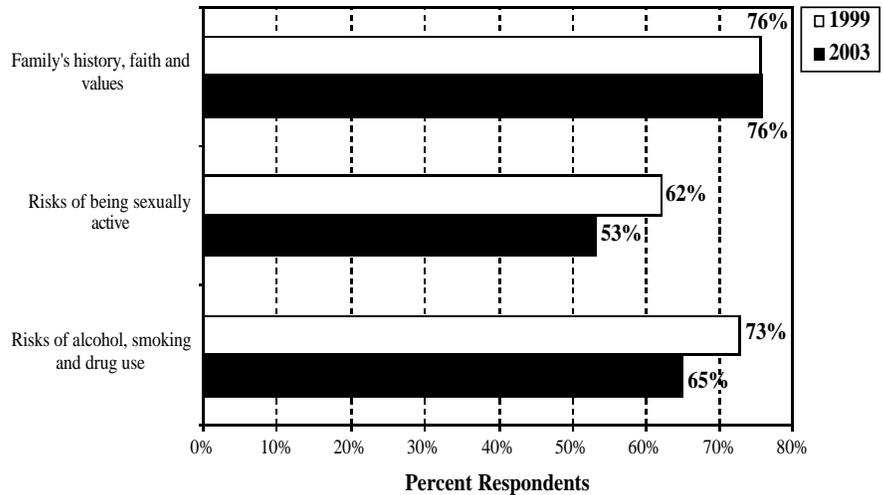
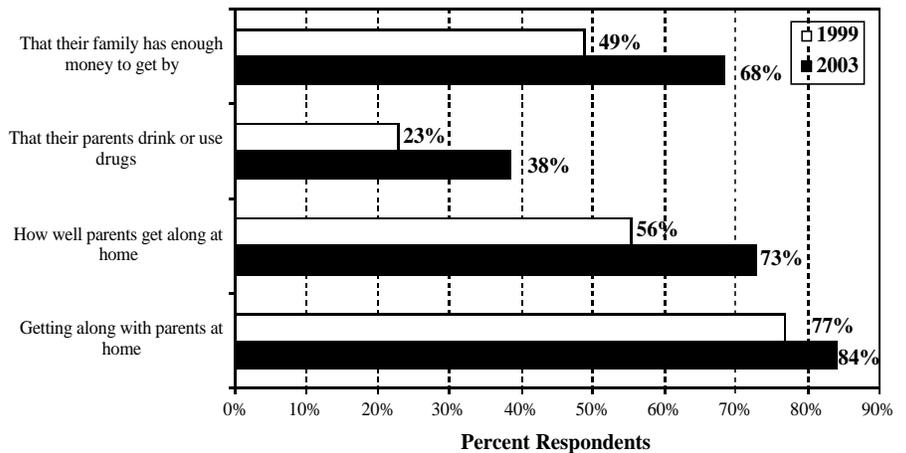


Figure 20:

Percent of Respondents That Worry at Least a Little About:



Sexual and Physical Abuse

Unfortunately, a number of teens continue to be subjected to sexual and physical abuse (figure 21). As many as 16% of respondents said that they had experienced sexual abuse by another teen and 7% had experienced such abuse by an adult. Such abuse includes unwanted kissing, unwanted touching, unwanted kissing and touching, sexual intercourse and other. Of those that reported experiencing unwanted sexual abuse by another teen, 47% indicated it was unwanted touching, and 10% said it was sexual intercourse. Among those reporting experiencing sexual abuse by an adult, 40% said it was unwanted touching, 16% indicated sexual intercourse.

The key to stopping any such abuse is, of course, to report it to someone so that appropriate action can be taken. In almost 60% of the cases, if a teen told their parents or a school staff person, the abuse was stopped. Telling an adult friend or group leader was somewhat effective - 41% of the time the abuse stopped. Telling an adult friend or group leader was somewhat effective - 41% of the time the abuse stopped. What clearly was less effective was telling only another teen - 20% of the time the abuse stopped; or telling no one at all - 6% of the time the abuse was halted (figure 22).

Figure 21:
Percent of Respondents That Have Ever Been Subject To:

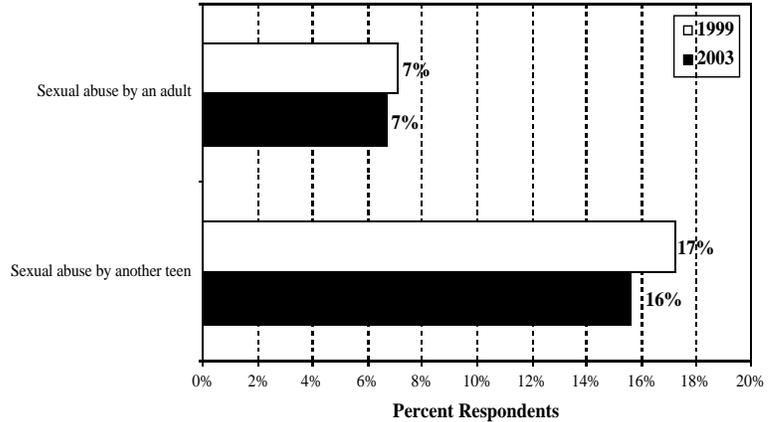
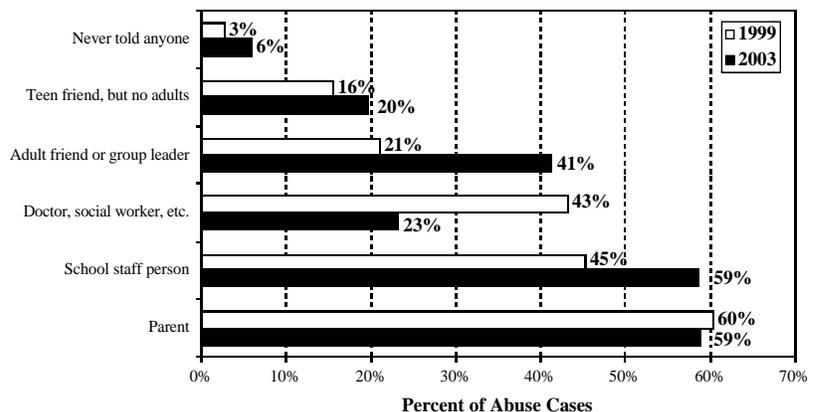


Figure 22:
Percent of Abuse Cases Where Sexual / Physical Abuse Stopped When the Following Were Told About the Abuse



Perceptions of Self and Peers

As might be expected, large numbers of teens worry about such things as their looks and how they fit in with others. Four out of every five respondents (80%) said that they were worried about how they looked; and as many as three out of every five (60%) worried about being too fat or too thin. The vast majority of all teens (87%) worried about fitting in with their peers at school as well (*figure 23*).

The influence of their peers can be obviously substantial. When asked about what their friends believed, as many as 75% said that their friends think that getting good grades is important. Almost as many (74%) said that they believed that their friends also don't feel that drugs and alcohol are needed to have a good time. More than half (55%) indicated that their friends feel it is important to help and contribute to their community, and almost as many (51%) felt that it would be best to postpone intercourse until after high school (*figure 24*).

Figure 23:
Percent of Respondents That Worry:

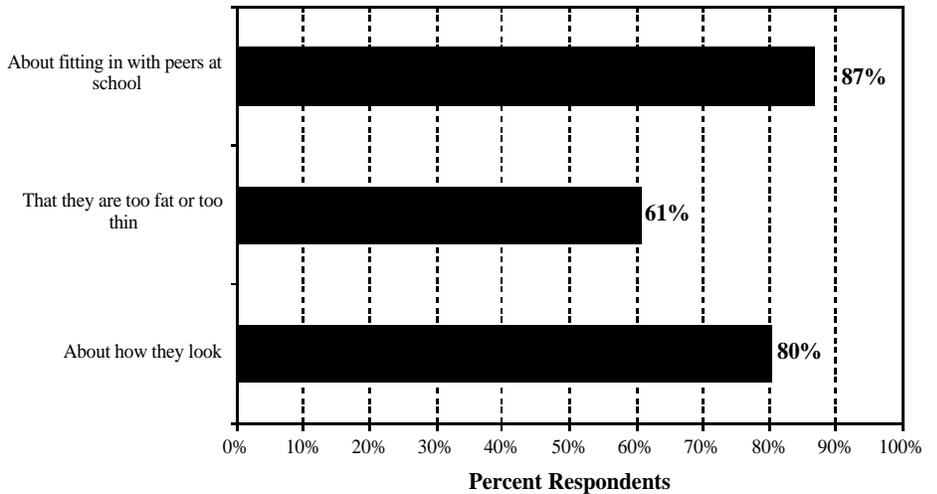
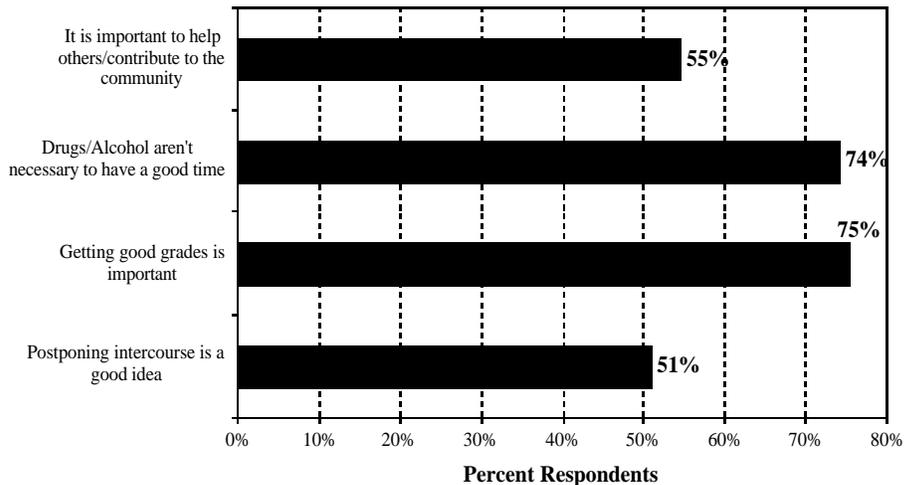


Figure 24:
Percent of Respondents That
Feel That Their Friends Believe:



Personal Safety

Teens continue to generally feel safe as they proceed through their day. While not all youth expressed total confidence that they were perfectly safe in all settings at all times, the vast majority of youth did. More than nine in ten teens said that they felt safe while at home (93%), and about eight out of ten stated that they felt safe while either in their communities (81%) or while in school (79%) (figure 25). The vast majority had never missed school as a result of personal safety concerns (88%) (figure 26).

Some youth, however, do still feel the pain of bullying and harassment. Almost one in six respondents (16%) said that they felt constantly harassed by another teen. More than one in three (35%) had been in a physical altercation in the past year. And more than four out of ten (41%) said they themselves had used physical or emotional intimidation to get something they wanted in the past 12 months (figure 27).

Figure 25:

Percent of Respondents That Feel Safe At:

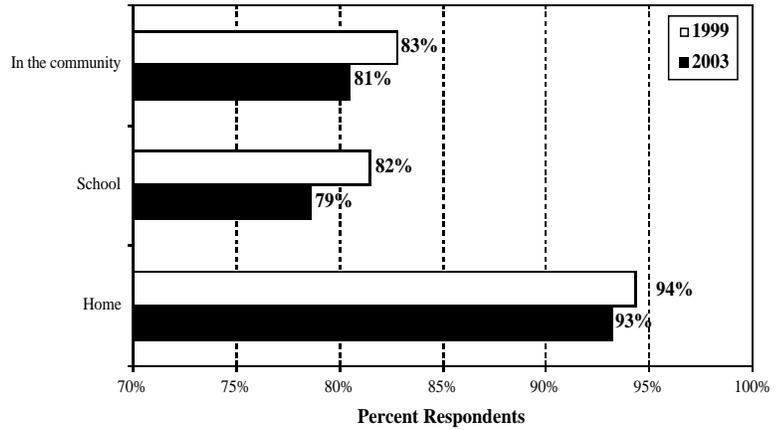


Figure 26:

How Frequently Have Youth Missed School as a Result of Personal Safety Concerns in Past Year

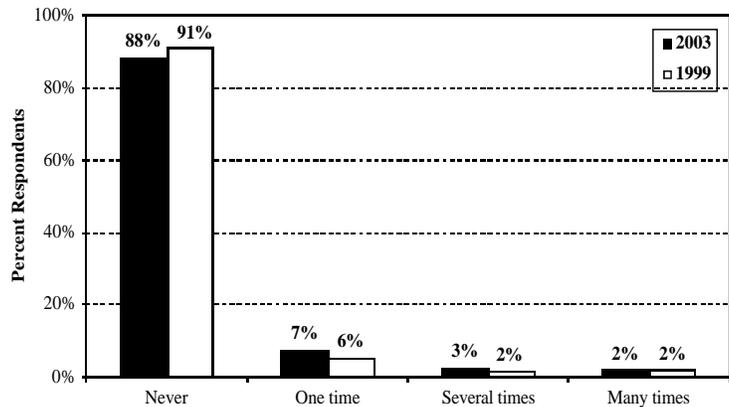
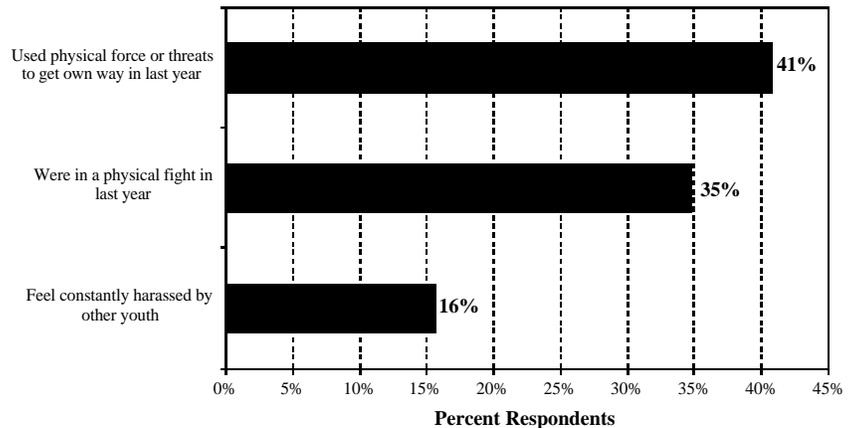


Figure 27:

Percent of Respondents That:



Positive Influences

Positive role models are one way to influence youth from becoming involved in dangerous behaviors. While 26% of all respondents didn't have a role model, as many as 24% said that their role model was one of their parents. An additional 11% cited some other relative as their role model. Nearly one in five respondents (18%) indicated that a celebrity, sport star or music star was their hero (*figure 28*).

The most common resource youth turn to in times of trouble is, typically, other teens. About half (49%) indicated that they turned to teen friends when they had a problem. Only about one in four (24%) stated that they turned to parents when they had issues that were troubling them. As many as one in ten (11%) said that they turned to no one when faced with a problem, choosing, instead, to keep it to themselves. These numbers are similar to those from the 1999 survey (*figure 29*).

The single greatest influence which helps teens avoid becoming involved in dangerous or destructive behaviors continues to be involved parents and families. As many as 84% of respondents said that involved parents and families was the most influential factor in keeping them from becoming involved in troublesome behaviors. The second most common influence was positive role models, and among those that had role models, parents were the most commonly cited. Clearly, parents and involved families continue to wield great influence as a positive factor in the lives of their children (*figure 30*).

Figure 28:
Respondents' Role Models

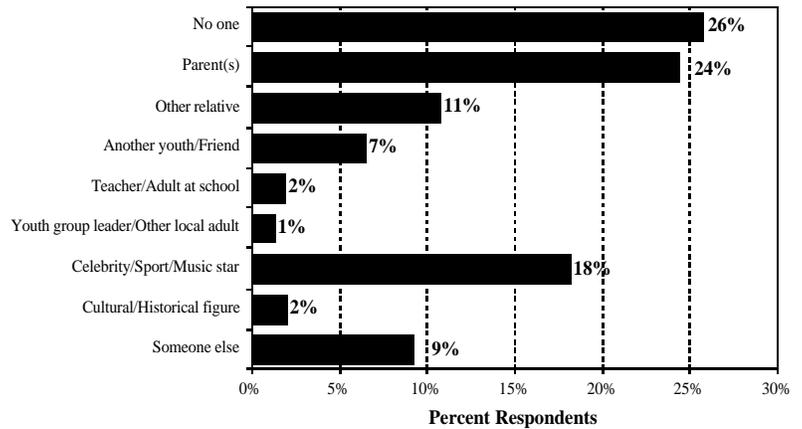


Figure 29:
Who Youth Turn to When They Have a Problem

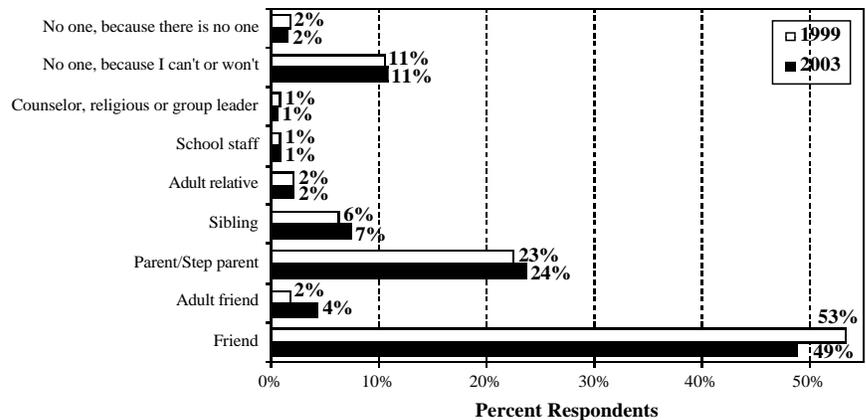
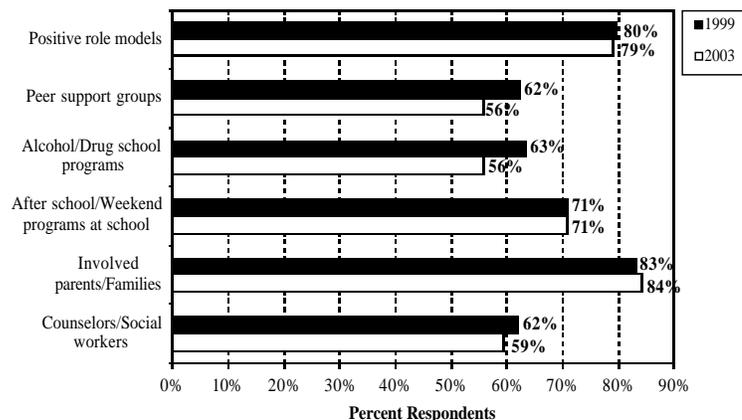


Figure 30:
Percent of Respondents That Indicate People or Programs Are Helpful in Keeping Youth From Engaging in Harmful Behaviors



CONCLUSION

The TAP survey continues to offer a unique means for discovering what young people are doing, how they feel, and how they perceive their relationships with those around them. It is a valuable tool for youth services planning. To this end, it is helpful to identify where significant changes occurred between the 1999 and 2003 TAP Surveys and how Oneida County's youth in 2003 compare to youth nationally. Additionally, the survey is helpful for those that live and work directly with young people to explore how youth perceive their relationships with their parents, peers, school and community and how they feel these relationships help them navigate this journey from childhood to independence. By examining these relationships, parents, school personnel, agency workers, administrators, and government program personnel can do a better job in supporting and guiding our youth.

Risk Behaviors Decline

Based on the results of the 2003 TAP survey, it is very apparent that the majority of youth are well adjusted and dealing with the trappings of adolescence as best as might be expected. Many have healthy lives and attitudes about some of the dangers that lay before them and clearly have made good choices in the past and have positive attitudes about the future. When compared to the youth that participated in the 1999 TAP Survey, more appear to be avoiding involvement in commonly identified risk behaviors. Furthermore, the County's youth in 2003 appear in most cases to be doing better than youth nationally.

In looking at these risk behaviors, tobacco use has had the biggest drop. Whereas, in 1999, 44% of respondents indicated that they had ever smoked a cigarette, by 2003 this dropped to 28%. This means more than a third fewer youth have tried smoking. Alcohol use also declined though not as dramatically. In 1999, 54% of the County's youth reported that they tried alcohol; this dropped to 48% in 2003. More impressive is the reduction in the percentage of youth that indicated they had drunk five or more drinks within a couple of hours during the past 30 days. This binge drinking dropped from 23% in 1999 to 14% in 2003, representing a reduction of about 40% since 1999. Marijuana use experienced a less impressive drop, but a drop nonetheless. In 1999, 28% of respondents indicated that they had ever tried marijuana; in 2003 this dropped to 25%.

The decline in risk behaviors is certainly positive news, but even more heartening is the fact that these declines are

even more pronounced in the two younger grades, 7th and 9th, versus 11th grade, and most evident in the 7th grade. As noted above, overall tobacco use from 1999 to 2003 dropped by more than a third, but in comparing 7th graders in 1999 to those in 2003, the drop was by half. Likewise for alcohol use, whereas the overall reduction in drinking was 11%, it was 43% for 7th graders. For marijuana use, the overall drop was 11%, but 50% fewer 7th graders in 2003 indicated that they ever used marijuana than in 1999. And, in the area of sexual intercourse, the overall drop was just 3%, but for 7th graders - 22%.

To say this is a trend is premature since this is only the second Oneida County TAP Survey, but it does show a reported reduction in these risk behaviors.

What makes this information particularly positive is that the County's youth involvement in these risk behaviors is already well below the levels seen nationally. In comparing the rate of involvement in the table below of just the 9th and 11th grade students locally versus nationally, it is evident that a large percentage of our area youth, relatively speaking, are avoiding those risky behaviors.

Table 1:
Percent of 9th & 11th Graders in Oneida County and in the United States that Have Smoked, Drank, Used Marijuana or Had Sex

| | Oneida County 9th & 11th Graders | United States 9th & 11th Graders |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Ever smoke Tobacco | 36% | 48% |
| Ever drink Alcohol | 64% | 76% |
| Ever use Marijuana | 34% | 41% |
| Ever have Sexual Intercourse | 36% | 45% |

Furthermore, it is again youth in the youngest grade, in this case 9th graders, that show the least comparative involvement in these risky behaviors. Just as the greatest reduction from 1999 to 2003 in these risk behaviors for Oneida County was in the early grades, it is also evident that this disparity between local use of tobacco, alcohol and marijuana and national use of these substances is more pronounced for 9th graders than for 11th graders, though this is not the case for sexual intercourse.

In addition to the lower involvement in risk behaviors, there is also ample evidence that young people overall in 2003 felt better about themselves than was the case in 1999. In

comparing the results of the 2003 TAP Survey to those of the 1999 TAP Survey, fewer youth indicated they had felt despondent for an extended period of time; fewer reported that they had either run away or thought seriously about running away from home; and fewer said that they had either seriously considered attempting suicide or had made plans about how to attempt suicide. Unfortunately, there was no change in the percentage that reported actually attempting suicide or that indicated they had made an attempt that resulted in an injury requiring professional medical attention. These percentages for suicide attempts and for attempts that result in injury, however, are virtually the same as the national figures from the 2001 National Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS) Survey. What is interesting and is cause for some concern is that despite the declines seen in suicide ideation, the County's youth remain more apt to have these thoughts than youth nationally. In 1999, just over one in four (26%) of the 9th and 11th graders in Oneida County indicated that they had seriously considered suicide during the past 12 months; in 2003 this dropped down to 22%. That is the good news. What is sobering is that nationally for 9th and 11th graders the percentage is 18%. This same pattern is seen for the percentage that indicated that they had made a plan during the last year about how they would commit suicide. For the County's 9th and 11th graders this percentage dropped from 20% in 1999 to 19% in 2003, but the national percentage is just 15%.

As can be seen from this review, young people in Oneida County, at least in respect to involvement in risky behaviors, have improved significantly from 1999 to 2003 and are doing better than youth nationally. In addition, a lower proportion of the County's youth in 2003 report being either despondent or suicidal. However, this proportion needs to come down considerably before it matches the national level.

Four Domains

As youth make this often perilous journey from childhood to young adulthood, they coexist within four social domains. The first and most important domain is their family. Youth continue to indicate that the single greatest factor in keeping them from becoming involved in harmful or negative behaviors is involved parents and families. The second, and for some youth the most important, domain is their peers. When teens face serious problems, more times than not they turn to their friends for support before a parent or another significant adult. The third domain is their school, and the fourth is the community. Based on the survey results, it is possible to some extent to evaluate how youth perceive these domains and how well these domains help them navigate this often perilous journey through adolescence.

1. Family Domain

Within the family domain, the survey results present a mixed picture. On the positive side, it is apparent that more youth in 2003 than in 1999 believe their parents set limits, hold them accountable and monitor their activities. A greater percentage indicated that their parents either often or always set clear rules for them to follow (59% in 1999 to 69% in 2003). A greater percentage reported that their parents disciplined or punished them for breaking rules (47% in 1999 to 53% in 2003). More said that their parents expect them to call home if they are not there (73% in 1999 to 81% in 2003), and more reported that their parents know their friends (71% in 1999 to 81% in 2003).

On the negative side, fewer parents are talking with their children about the dangers of some of the risk behaviors. In 1999, 27% of the youth respondents noted that their parents never talked to them in the past year about the risk of smoking, drinking and taking drugs; by 2003 this percentage increased to 35%. Likewise, regarding the risk of being sexually active, in 1999 38% said that their parents had never talked to them about the associated risks; in 2003 this increased to 47%. What is good to see is that if faced with a serious problem, about eight out of ten (79%) youth noted that they could turn to their parents if they needed someone to talk to. However, looking at those youth that reported actually facing serious problems, few report, in both the 1999 and 2003 surveys, turning to their parents for help and more say they seek the help of friends. Of those that indicated they had suicidal thoughts, just 7% in 2003 said they turned to a parent or other caring adult, while 18% said they talked to a teen friend, in response to those thoughts. For those youth that had been physically hurt or had received unwanted sexual activity, just 22% report telling a parent while 32% said they told a teen friend.

Communication between teens and their parents has long been an issue, but what is evident from the result of the 2003 TAP Survey, and what was the emphasis in the conclusion of the 1999 TAP Survey Report, is that families are the primary factor in the social, emotional and intellectual growth of our youth. Involved families are what teens desire and what they see as their best hope in negotiating the difficult path of adolescence. A factor that could be seen as a barrier to this communication, but also highlights the importance of more communication, is that youth in 2003 seem somewhat more worried than in 1999 both about their relationship with their parents and about the welfare of their family. In 1999, 54% of the respondents said that they were worried at least a little bit about how well they got along with their parents; in 2003 73% report this concern. There were similar jumps in the percentage of youth that report at least a little concern about

how well their parents get along with each other (54% in 1999 to 73% in 2003); about their parents drinking or using drugs (23% in 1999 to 38% in 2003); and about their family having enough money to get by (49% in 1999 to 68% in 2003). The fact that almost seven out of ten (68%) youth report that they are at least a little worried about their family's financial stability is a clear indicator that there is a perception among youth that many families are facing financial pressures. Parents seem to be spending less time with their children. The percentage of youth that report spending two to ten hours at home with no adult present increased from 42% in 1999 to 53% in 2003. Another indicator is that 35% of youth reported that their families sit down to dinner together just two or fewer times per week, and only 45% say they have dinner together five or more times per week.

In short, based on these results, parents seem to be monitoring their children more and holding them more accountable; this may explain to some extent the declines in those risk behaviors. However, at the same time, parents appear to be communicating less frequently and spending less time with their children.

2. Peer Domain

Outside of the family domain, many young people view the peer domain as most important. Despite the fact that most of the questions related to peer relations changed between the 1999 and 2003 TAP Surveys, it is evident from both surveys that young people, by a large majority, feel good about their friendships. However, it is also evident that most are anxious about how they fit in with their peers and, clearly, some suffer from harassment and bullying by other youth. So, it would have to be said that the peer domain also presents a mixed picture in how supportive it is of young people.

For instance, 87% of the respondents to the 1999 survey reported that they were happy with the number of friends that they have and with the quality and strength of those friendships. In the 2003 survey, 84% said that they could turn to their friends if they had a serious personal problem, and 81% said that their friend(s) would stop them from doing something foolish or dangerous.

On the other hand, 87% of the 2003 survey respondents indicated that they worried at least a little about how well they fit in with other kids at school, and about a quarter (24%) said they worried about this a lot. In 1999, far fewer, just 55%, said they worried at least a little about not fitting in. Though the question was somewhat different, that does not explain this apparent jump in anxiety about fitting in with their peers. In a related question, 80% in 2003 and 82% in 1999 indicated that they worried at least a little about how they looked.

Certainly, much of this anxiety can be attributed to typical teenage feelings of self-consciousness and crises in identity, but some of this can also be caused by actual threats, harassment and abuse. Almost one in six (16%) of young men and women, respectively, indicated in the 2003 survey that they felt constantly teased, threatened or harassed by other youth. About the same percentage (17%) said that they occasionally to very often used force or threats to get their own way. Some 37% of the female respondents and 15% of the male respondents indicated that they had experienced some form of unwanted sexual harassment from another youth, and 23% of young women and 8% of young men reported that another teen had done something sexual to them that they did not want. Clearly, for some youth, the peer domain can provide important support and guidance, but it can also provide a potential for danger.

3. School Domain

Looking next at the school domain, the results from both the 1999 and the 2003 surveys show that the great majority of youth both enjoy school and care about doing well. There is, however, a minority for which this is not true.

In 2003, 64% of the respondents reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoy going to school. Over 80% said that they agreed or strongly agreed with two different positive statements about their teachers: one, that their teachers have high expectations for them; and two, that their teachers care about them and how well they do. Over half (56%) said in both the 1999 and 2003 surveys that the rules at school are the same for everyone and enforced fairly. Most (79%) in 2003 reported that they viewed school as safe. Almost all of the 2003 respondents (96%) indicated that they worried "at least a little" about getting good grades; 83% said they worried about this "a fair amount to a lot." In 1999, about the same percentage (95%) said they worried about this "at least a little," but fewer than in 2003, just 75%, indicated that they worried about this "a fair amount to a lot." So, there appears to be a slight increase in the intensity of student anxiety about grades. Despite this level of concern for grades, it appears that many youth are not spending much time doing homework. Over half (51%) of respondents indicated that they spent only one hour or less doing homework per week.

Overall, students for the most part enjoy school, appreciate their teachers and care about doing well. Their anxiety regarding grades has increased slightly, but yet many are not spending much time doing homework. There remains the problems of the use and distribution of illegal drugs on school property, but it would appear that this problem, at least, has not gotten worse between 1999 and 2003, that it is a problem shared by schools across the country and that it affects only a

small minority of students. In short, schools provide the great majority of students a safe environment to interact with their peers and teachers, and most are happily engaged in the positive pursuit of learning, though there seems to be some increasing anxiety about getting good grades.

4. Community Domain

The community domain is where youth spend a lot of their free, often unsupervised, time. So naturally, it is also the domain where youth will more often get into trouble, particularly if they are not involved in more positive activities. This said, just over half (53%) of the respondents in 2003 indicated that they agreed that there were things for kids their age to do in the community. Somewhat more (67%) said that they agreed that adults in their community care and value kids; and even more (74%) reported that they agreed that there were adults in their community whom they could count on to help them if they had a problem. Some 57% indicated that they agreed that they would be comfortable talking with a police officer if they had a problem or needed help.

The flip side of this is that almost half of the youth disagreed that there are things to do in their community, and over one quarter are apparently not connecting, at least positively, with an adult in their community. This may partially explain why some youth are using illegal drugs and why some are involved in illegal or dangerous activities. Some 18% of the respondents indicated that they had shoplifted or stolen something, and slightly less (17%) said they had vandalized property, in the past year. In the 2003 survey, about one in five youth reported carrying weapons and about one in twenty reported carrying a gun in the community during the past year. This was slightly less than in 1999. As far as the percentage that reported carrying a weapon, this dropped from 22% in 1999 to 18% in 2003, and for carrying a gun, this dropped from 7% in 1999 to 6% in 2003. Also, a slightly lower percentage (25% in 1999 versus 22% in 2003) reported getting into trouble with the police in the past year.

There is also the question of how easy is it for young people to access illegal substances, such as tobacco and alcohol, within the community. The logic is that the easier it is for teens to get these substances, the more likely they are to use them. When asked where they usually get alcohol, of those that reported drinking, about 5% said that they buy it at a store or bar, in the 2003 sample. This is a decline from 10% who said they got alcohol from these sources in 1999. So, it would seem from this that it has become somewhat harder for young people to buy alcohol within the community. The 2001 National YRBS Survey also asks about how they usually get their own cigarettes. In the national survey, 23% of the 9th and 11th grade respondents that smoke indicated that in

the last 30 days they usually bought their cigarettes themselves from either a store or a vending machine. In the 2003 TAP Survey, just 18% of the 9th and 11th graders that smoke said this. Apparently, it is somewhat harder for young people in Oneida County to buy cigarettes for themselves than is true nationally. Following the logic outlined above, it would seem that the community is doing a better job in restricting young people's access to alcohol and tobacco.

In addition, there is the question of how easy it is for young people to access needed health and social services in the community. The participants in the 2003 TAP Survey were asked about four service areas: 1. Pregnancy/birth control/abstinence counseling, 2. Sexual/physical abuse, 3. Alcohol/drug abuse, and 4. Depression or thoughts of suicide. For each service area, they were asked to indicate whether help was offered or not. And, in each case, about two in five said "no help is offered," two in five said "help is offered," and one in five said "they did not know." This raises the question about the perceived availability of these services throughout the county and may suggest that more could be done to inform young people about existing services.

The community domain appears to have some significant holes, at least as perceived by young people. Nearly half have said that there is little to do in their communities, and as many as one third report that they feel adults in their community do not care or value kids. Perhaps some of this can be attributed to teenage angst, but it may also mean that some communities are not effectively reaching out to their young people. On the other hand, it appears that the community has done a fairly good job in restricting youth access to tobacco and alcohol even though, clearly, youth have other sources. However, it would appear the community could do a better job in providing information to young people about available social services.

The results of the 2003 TAP Survey, especially when compared to both the 1999 TAP Survey and the 2001 National YRBS Survey, provide a valuable tool for assessing the welfare of our youth and for evaluating how well parents, peers, schools and the community are doing in supporting our youth. Clearly, the great majority of our young people are doing fine, and given some of the changes seen, particularly in the declining use of illegal substances, there is reason for optimism. There is evidence, however, that young people are experiencing more anxiety. They seem more worried about their relationship with their parents, more worried about their parents' marital and financial situation, more worried about fitting in with their peers, more worried about getting good grades, and more uncertain about their future. When asked what they think they would likely do after finishing high school, 18% in the 2003 survey said they did not know yet; only 11% of the 1999 respondents said

they did not know. Despite this apparent increase in anxiety, fewer respondents in 2003 than in 1999 indicated that they had either seriously considered or had made plans to commit suicide. Thus, for the most part, young people, at least in that respect, appear to be coping with this increased level of anxiety. In viewing the four domains, clearly there are ways that each can improve in helping support our young people. Each domain may want to consider ways that they can lower the level of youth anxiety and increase the level of youth confidence, self-direction and optimism.

